

**The Hulunbuir
and Transbaikalia Playground.
Microphysics of Power
on the Sino-Russian Border**

**Edited by
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II. Hulun Buir: Its Ethnic and Linguistic Situation

Veronika Zikmundová¹, Veronika Kapišovská², Bayarma Khabtagaeva³

1. Introduction

Modern Hulun Buir is one of the distinctly multi-ethnic areas in China. It is in many ways comparable to other pronouncedly multi-ethnic regions of northern China. In the following text we present preliminary findings from collective fieldwork in the western part of modern Hulun Buir, which was carried out by the three authors in September 2017. This fieldwork was focused on gathering material for comparative linguistic research and data on the current sociolinguistic situation of the Mongolic (Buryat, Bargu, Daur and Khamnigan Mongol) and Tungusic (Solon, Khamnigan Ewenki) languages spoken in western Hulun Buir. In the present text we use additional data gathered in the course of repeated visits to Hulun Buir (2010–2016) by one of the authors. The aim of this field report is, first, to describe the current situation of the state of preservation, prestige, and speakers' attitude to the languages under investigation, and, second, to outline the main tendencies and dynamics in the co-existence, contacts, and hierarchy of these languages.

The modern administrative region of Hulun Buir clearly consists of two geographic units which differ from one another in natural conditions and, consequently, in the prevailing life-style of their inhabitants. The western part is a continuation of the Mongolian and Zabaykalian steppes. Its arid climate and rather flat terrain are suitable for nomadic herding. The eastern part is dominated by the densely wooded Khingan mountains, providing the best conditions for hunting and small-scale agriculture. In the western part, the majority of non-Chinese inhabitants are of Mongolic descent (the New and Old Bargu, Öölöd, Buryat, Daur and Khorchin). Besides, there are two bilingual (Mongolic-Tungusic) communities – the Solon and the Khamnigan. The eastern part is mainly inhabited by Tungusic-speaking communities (Yakut Ewenki, Solon and Orochen) and the Daur.

In the present text we focus on the western part, which is linguistically more diverse and abounds with interesting sociolinguistic features.

1.1. Historical context of the present linguistic situation in western Hulun Buir

Administrative and political changes in western Hulun Buir since the 17th century

Before the great political changes connected to the Russian westward expansion and the Manchu conquest of the Mongol areas, the grasslands of modern western Hulun

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Buir lay on the margins of three political powers: the Khalkha Setsen Khans in the west, the Khorchins in the south and the Solon (Daur-Ewenki) confederation in the north-east. In 1689, the border between Russia and China was established along the Argun River, which made this apparently sparsely populated area part of the Qing empire. At this time the area was inhabited mostly by Bargu, Buryat and Khamnigan groups. Between 1732 and 1734 several groups were resettled into this area by the Qing government and organized into 17 military-administrative divisions (*banners* of the Eight Banner Military System): two Old (or Chipchin) Bargu banners, eight banners of the New Bargu, six Solon banners and one Öölöd banner. From then on, the area was administered by the seat of the General of Heilongjiang in Qiqikar (Ölzii 1990: 21). Hailar, then a military garrison, became the seat of the *fudutong*, called *amban* by the Mongols, who was the highest official in charge of local bannermen. The *fudutong*'s office oversaw a territory roughly corresponding to the area described in the present paper. Two Daur clans – Gowol and Aula – soon grew to the highest positions in the Banner administration. The position of the Hailar *fudutong* and second-in-command positions were mostly held by Daur of these two clans (Atwood 2002: 70).

In 1908, as part of the Qing New Policies, the *fudutong*'s position was abolished and replaced by a civilian Chinese governor (Atwood 2002: 120). This started a series of subsequent administrative changes. The Hulun Buir Banner leaders closely followed Outer Mongolia in expelling the Chinese officials and soldiers, and, with some support from Russia, abolished the border between Khalkha and Hulun Buir and joined the independent Mongolian state (Urbansky 2014: 9). Ruled by the Daur *amban* Shengfu, Hulun Buir was an autonomous part of Outer Mongolia for three years, at the same time being under a constant pressure from the Heilongjiang authorities who demanded the return of the area to Chinese control. Disappointed with the lack of Russian support, some of the Hulun Buir leaders (namely the Old Bargu and Solon) became inclined to give up independence. The Russo-Chinese treaty of 1913, which delimited the spheres of influence of both states over the Mongol areas, did not explicitly mention Hulun Buir, whose status was further negotiated by the two powers (Urbansky 2014: 17). In 1915, Hulun Buir was finally separated from Outer Mongolia and made an autonomous region under direct control of the central Beijing government, at the same time remaining under strong Russian influence. In 1920, in connection to the turmoil created mainly by the Russian Civil War, Hulun Buir's autonomy was limited by the Manchurian government led by the warlord Zhang Zuolin, to be finally abolished in 1925 (Ölzii 1990: 26). The hopes for independence and eventual reunification with Outer Mongolia, however, did not disappear; the last attempt was planned in 1928 but was halted by the general political situation and the Russian withdrawal of support (Zikmundová 2018: 62). The former administrative institutions and titles were restored immediately in 1920 and kept until 1949.

In 1931, Hulun Buir came under Japanese control, becoming the Northern Khinggan province of Manchukuo (Ölzii 1990: 26). The Japanese rule in Hulun Buir lasted until 1945 and accounts of this period greatly vary in their evaluations of the status, degree of autonomy and general conditions of life during these 14 years. Generally, it seems that the degree of autonomy of the indigenous leaders was considerable, as long as they remained loyal to the Japanese. The administrative structure was maintained throughout the whole time with a Daur *amban* as a head and Manchu as the main

language of administration. At times, the Mongols' ideas on autonomy and political orientation clashed with their Japanese rulers, such as in the case of the resistance and execution of the Daur *amban* Lingsheng (cf. e.g. Bulag 2009: 9), and when the Hulun Buir Mongol soldiers of the Japanese army sided with the Khalkha Mongols in the Nomonkhan/Khalkhyn gol military conflict (Bulag 2009: 11–12).

After the Second World War and the defeat of Japan, the Daur and Bargu leaders of Hulun Buir used this opportunity to take the local administration firmly into their own hands. In 1947, they were the first of the Chinese Mongols to proclaim autonomous government, with the Bargu noble Erhimbatu as a head. Only two years later, the autonomous Hulun Buir was absorbed by the newly created Inner Mongolian autonomous province, thus ending four decades of the special status of the area (Ölzii 1990: 26).

Between 1950 and 1953, areas in the south and east were added to the original Hulun Buir, thus creating its present territory. For four years between 1969 and 1971, the area was placed under the jurisdiction of the Heilongjiang province. Since 1971, it has been part of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region (Ölzii 1990: 22).

After the declaration of the independence of Outer Mongolia, throughout the 20th century the Hulun Buir (mostly Bargu and Daur) nobility and leaders were in close contact with the new state, often playing important roles in the politics of Mongolia.

Demographic processes

Although some of the modern ethnic groups in Hulun Buir, notably the Bargu and the Khorchins, claim earlier historical ties to the area, all local inhabitants derive the Khamnigan their origins from groups that settled in Hulun Buir after the 17th century (Atwood 2005: 9). The earliest immigrant groups were the Solons (Daur and Ewenki), the Old or Chipchin Bargu and the Öölöds (1732), immediately followed by the New Bargu in 1734. At the beginning of the 20th century, the major demographic events were the arrival of Buryats and Khamnigans, which took place mainly in the 1920s, and massive in-migration of Russians, first connected to the Chinese Eastern Railway construction and later increased by emigration from Russia during the Civil War and political changes in Siberia. Between 1931 and 1945, a considerable number of Japanese settlers lived in Hulun Buir. After their sudden departure in 1945, many Japanese children were left behind and raised by local inhabitants (fieldwork data 2016). Throughout the 20th century, groups of Khorchins migrated to Hulun Buir. This influx steadily increased, becoming substantial after the 1950s, and continuing to the present day. The immigration of Mandarin speakers and, in particular, their settlement in the countryside, came considerably later and became a significant demographic factor only after the Cultural Revolution. In fact, penetration of large groups of Han Chinese into the rural areas began only in the 1990s.

Education

It seems that several forms of literacy and classical education were widespread among the Hulun Buir bannermen from the 17th century. According to Ölzii, before the 19th century the Bargu and Öölöd bannermen predominantly used the Mongol script, while the knowledge of Manchu was limited to some aristocratic families. Manchu and Chinese started to be taught in the Bargu Banners on a regular basis from 1882 (Ölzii

1990: 21). Among the Solons, written Manchu was widely used, often together with the Mongol and sometimes Chinese scripts. In addition, the Daur created a more-or less standardized transliteration of the Daur vernacular based on the Manchu script, which was used by the Daur intellectual elite.⁴ From 1911, the traditional system of education was challenged by attempts at modernization (Atwood 2002: 123).

The importance of all previous efforts fades compared to the activities of the young Daur intellectuals Merse and Fumingtai and their families (Zikmundová 2018: 28). As a result of their efforts, by the 1930s several modern schools had been established in the Hulun Buir region (mainly in Hailar, Nantun, Meheert and the Bargu Banner seats in Xitun, Altan Emeel and Amgalan) where the Mongol, Manchu, Chinese and Russian written languages were taught. Merse's Cyrillic transcription of Daur seems to have been experimentally taught on a small scale (Zikmundová 2018: 73). Perhaps the most famous is the school for girls in Meheert, Merse's hometown, where, besides Mongol and Chinese, Russian was taught by Russian and Buryat teachers (Atwood 2002: 139). In 1929, Merse also established a school for Mongols in Mukden where English was part of the curriculum.

After the October Revolution, communities of refugees from Russia settled in Hailar, Manzhouli and other places. In the 1920s, a Russian school, as well as schools for other groups such as Russian Jews⁵ and Tatars,⁶ existed in western Hulun Buir.

During the Manchukuo era, Japanese schools existed in the area and many local intellectuals, after completing primary education at these schools, received higher education in Japan. In the second half of the 20th century, a dense network of Mongol language schools was built in western Hulun Buir. In the ethnic Mongol areas, every *sum* had a primary, and some even a secondary Mongol school. At one point, there were Mongol primary schools in most settlements. This began to change in the past two decades, when the closure of the Mongol schools on the level of *sum* begun.

The Hulun Buir University has a strong department of Mongolian studies, where some of the lectures are held in Mongolian.

In recent years, several private educational projects have been implemented. For example, in Shinehen, a Buryat kindergarten is run by a group of local volunteers, in which children from all ethnic backgrounds are accepted but the language of communication and instruction is Buryat. While Mongolian kindergartens have often appeared throughout the areas inhabited by Mongols elsewhere in China, a rather unparalleled enterprise is that of a private three-year school run by a Bargu owner, which prepares Mongol students for university studies, focusing mainly on training in mathematics and English. The language of instruction in this school is Mongolian.

Thus (Standard) Mongolian together with Written Mongol have enjoyed relatively strong position as languages of instruction. Until the 1980s–1990s, not only the Mongols (Bargu, Buryat, Khorchin, etc.) but also Daur, Solons, Khamnigans and even Russians preferred to send their children to Mongol schools. Even though this situation has changed in the past few decades, the Mongolian languages are still an important

⁴ A frequently quoted example of a Daur learned man from the 19th century is Aola Changxing whose collected works were published in 2010 (Aola Bilige 2010, *Dawuer wenxue zongshi Aola Changxing ziliao* [Collected material of the Daur esteemed master Aola Changxing]).

⁵ <http://www.jewsofchina.org/hailar> (18.9.2019).

⁶ <http://theperemechlounge.blogspot.com/2009/02/hailar-tatar-school-manchuria-tatars.html>.

means of communication among the various ethnic groups, and literacy in Written Mongol is widespread.

2. Ethnic groups and languages of western Hulun Buir

Hulun Buir language communities and the overall linguistic situation at the end of the 20th century were made available to the western audience through a series of works by Juha Janhunen. In 1997, he published an overview of the state of preservation and prospects of survival of the ethnic languages in Manchuria, including those of Hulun Buir. In the following section, we list the ethnic groups of western Hulun Buir and compare the situation we observed during our last visit to the area in 2017 with Janhunen's description.

2.1. Bargu

The Bargu speakers, though at present possibly outnumbered by the Khorchins, form the "titular" (Janhunen 1997: 134) Mongol population of Hulun Buir. Indeed, they seem to be the earliest documented inhabitants of western Hulun Buir in modern history. While the Bargu and their closest neighbors the Khori, both living in the area immediately east of Lake Baikal, were important in forming the base of the early Mongol Empire in the 12th century, their destinies in the later Middle Ages are poorly documented. It seems that the Bargu, remaining on the margins of great empires, long retained the structure in which clan-based units were rather independent and often migrated separately, joining other groups. According to Atwood (2004: 34), some of the Bargu and Khori gradually migrated into what is now the northernmost part of the Inner Mongolian Hulun Buir region and became tributaries of the emerging Solon (Daur and Ewenki) confederation, with the center in the region known as Dauria. Thus the Bargu are historically a branch of the language community today known as Buryats. Although their homelands before the 17th century included north-western parts of modern Hulun Buir, the paths of the two modern Bargu groups to their present sites were rather complicated. In the turmoil created by the Manchu approach from the south and the Russian Cossacks arriving from the west, one group of Khori and Bargu migrated west, becoming subjects of the Khalkha Setsen Khan, while another group at some point became subjects of the Manchus and together with the Solons were deported to the Qiqikar region. There they were incorporated into the Manchu Eight Banner system and became known as the Solon Bargu or Chipchin Bargu. The designation Chibchin originally refers to one Bargu clan, and, according to Zoriktuev (2013: 100), the same clan name also occurs among the Horse Tungus of the Nercha region. After several decades, some of these Bargu, together with Solons, were moved to Hulun Buir as a part of the Manchu program of populating the empire's borderlands. Around the same time, the Khori-Bargu living in Khalkha became dissatisfied with their rulers and requested help from the Manchus who, several years after the relocation of the first Bargu group, settled them likewise in Hulun Buir. The two groups became distinguished, as was the Manchu custom in such situations, by the appella-

tion “old” for those who arrived earlier and “new” for those who followed. Zoriktuev (2013: 99, supported by e.g. Lattimore 1935: 162) assumes that the immigrants from Khalkha were of Khori, not Bargu, descent but were labelled as Bargu by the Manchus. Needless to say that in this time, as well as throughout the following two centuries, the labels we now tend to interpret as “ethnic” were largely based on customs and motivations scarcely known to us.

During the half-century that preceded the relocation of the two Bargu groups to Hulun Buir, Old Bargu stayed in surroundings suitable for hunters, together with groups whose lifestyle was a mixture of hunting and agriculture, while the New Bargu assumed a purely nomadic herding lifestyle. Unfortunately, we have little information about the Bargu lifestyle before these migrations, but their Transbaikalian origin suggests that, like other Buryats, they were both hunters and herders, therefore being able to accustom to both “extremes.” Generally, besides speaking an “aberrant variety of Buryat” (Janhunen 1997), the Old Bargu are known for preservation of more archaic features in their culture and social structure, namely the original clan system and shamanic practices. In contrast, the New Bargu became heavily influenced by the Khalkha milieu, which, as well as changes in language, led to their adoption of Buddhism. According to our informants, the New Bargu were one of the groups charged with the care of the imperial herds during the Qing period.

In terms of language, both Bargu varieties are related to Buryat. According to Afanas'yeva (2006: 136), the language of Old Bargu has features reminiscent of western Buryat (the Barguzin and Baikal-Kudara dialects), while the language of New Bargu is more closely related to the eastern Buryat – the Khori dialect. Common features of New and Old Bargu notwithstanding, New Bargu has been influenced by Khalkha on all levels while Old Bargu preserves more Buryat features along with certain independent innovations. It is also possible that contacts with Daur, Solon and Khorchin speakers are the source of the phonetic and lexical peculiarities in the Old Bargu variety.

Janhunen (1997: 134) supposes that **Old Bargu** is only spoken by the older generation, while the “younger generation seems to have completely gone over to what may be called the Modern Bargu dialect of Mongol, a dialect with only a few Buryat features remaining.” This indeed being the case, in 2017 in the Old Bargu Banner we were surprisingly introduced to a couple and one of their relatives, all in their 40s, who spoke Old Bargu fluently, claiming that they intentionally preserve their mother tongue.

The situation of **New Bargu** has not substantially changed from what Janhunen describes in 1997: most Bargu speakers of middle-aged and older generations in the grasslands of the two New Bargu Banners are fluent in Standard Mongol of the Bargu type in addition to the New Bargu dialect, whose range of usage has been shrinking. Only the youngest generation tends to go over to the Khorchin type standard.

2.2. *Öölöd*

The *Öölöd* community in Hulun Buir, usually known as the Imin *Öölöd*, has about 1,000 members. The members of the community derive their origin from the dispersed army of Galdan, an Oirat (Dzungar) ruler who, after invading Khalkha, was defeated

by the Manchus in 1696. The abandoned Oirat army scattered but its parts were soon reorganized and resettled by the Qing government, one population being first transported to Chakhar but, due to the lack of pastures there, soon resettled again in the vicinity of Qiqikar. More versions of this historical narrative (e.g. Lattimore 1935: 160) suggest that the Qiqikar Oirats may consist of several subsequent groups of Oirats. A group of these Qiqikar Oirats was brought to Hulun Buir together with the (then) Solons in 1732 and assigned lands in the valley of the river Imin south of Hailar. Their current center, the town of Imin, can be found there. Most of the population live as herders in the countryside around the town.

The common ground for being an Imin Öölöd is the notion of being a descendant of soldiers of the army of the Dzungar Khan Galdan. While being linguistically and culturally more or less assimilated by the New Bargus, the middle-aged and older generations still emphasize their Oirat origin and maintain contacts with Oirats from other areas. They keep and try to pass down certain signs of Oirat identity through the notion of their historical homeland, folk songs commemorating it, etc. According to Sarangerel (personal communication 2016), in terms of declared identity the Imin Öölöds are particularly vigorous: even families with one of four grandparents being Öölöd mostly identify themselves as Öölöd. Linguistically, in contrast to Janhunen's finding (1997: 135) that the Oirat dialect of the Imin Öölöd has been fully replaced by Khorchin, we encountered speakers in the Imin basin who intentionally use certain Oirat features, such as names of items from everyday life (e.g. *üs* 'milk' instead of Standard Mongolian 'süü' [cf. Oirat *üs* 'milk'] or *qos* 'boots' instead of Standard Mongolian *gatal* [cf. Oirat *qos/gos* 'boots']), or morphological peculiarities such as the 2nd person plural suffix *-tn* for the polite imperative (originally derived from Mongolic form *-GtUn*) (see also Todaeva 1960: 40).

2.3. Buryat

The Shinekhen Buryats, numbering around 5,000, live in three administrative units (*sum*) in the Imin valley south of Hailar. Most Buryats arrived between 1918 and 1930 escaping from the Civil War and Stalinist repressions in Russia. In the Buryat settlement in Hulun Buir, two Buryat leaders are assigned the key role: the *noyan* Namdag and Mikhail Bogdanov. In 1917, the two men first visited the Hulun Buir authorities and started negotiating an official resettlement of Russian Buryats in the region. In 1918, individual Buryat refugees started coming and setting on the Hulun Buir lands. Thanks to Namdag's negotiations, in 1921 a piece of land in the valley of the Shinekhen river was cut from the Imin Öölöd territory and given to the Buryats. Until the 1930s, new immigrants from Russia, often rich noble families with large herds, continued to join the Shinekhen Buryat community. On the way, the refugees crossed Mongolia where some of them remained, forming the Khentii and Dornod Buryat communities. During the 20th century, individual and group migrations occurred between the Khalkha – mainly Dornod – groups and Shinekhen. Further, in the mid-20th century, many Buryat families migrated to other parts of China such as Shilingol and Qinghai, some of them returning to Shinekhen later.

Along with Bargus and Daurs, Shinekhen Buryats played an important role in Hulun Buir politics after 1930. Presumably owing to the fact that many immigrants came

from wealthy, educated and rather well-situated families, the Buryat community mostly took active stands towards any political and social developments.

Linguistically, the language of Shinekhen Buryats belongs to the Khori dialectal group, i.e. it is close to Standard Buryat. According to our observations, the language has been preserved and fully coincides with the Aga sub-dialect, which is spoken in the former territory of Aga National District of Chita District (today the Zabaikalskiy Territory) from where they migrated to Hulun Buir. Shinekhen Buryat has so far mainly been studied by the Japanese scholar Yamakoshi (e.g. Yamakoshi 2011, 2017a, b., etc.).

In agreement with Janhunen (1997), we observed that Shinekhen Buryats consciously strive to keep knowledge of Buryat on a high level, although no education in the Buryat literary language is officially allowed in China. In a middle school in Shinekhen, where the official languages of instruction are Mongolian and Chinese, Buryat is used by the teachers outside classes, which foregrounds its importance among the schoolchildren. A preliminary observation suggests that Shinekhen Buryat, while still fully intelligible for Russian Buryats, also adopts certain lexical features and syntactical patterns from Standard Mongol, which makes it more intelligible for other Mongols of Inner Mongolia. All Shinekhen Buryats are bilingual in Mongol (any of the superdialects) and literate in written Mongol. At present, while Buryat language in Mongolia and Russia already qualifies as endangered, Shinekhen Buryats are the most vigorous Buryat language community.

2.4. *Khamnigan*

The trilingual language community of the Manchurian Khamnigan, officially classified within the Ewenki ethnic group along with the Solons and the so-called Yakut Ewenki from Alghuya, was first described by Janhunen.⁷ He was the first to classify the Mongolic dialect spoken by the Khamnigans as a separate and archaic Mongolic language and to note that two separate Ewenki dialects are used by this community. The two Ewenki varieties are called Boorji and Namiatii by the speakers – terms corresponding to Janhunen’s Borzya and Urulyungui varieties.

The origins of the Hulun Buir Khamnigans are still shrouded in mystery. They are probably descendants of the Horse Tungus – Ewenkis who adopted a Mongolian way of life. Having lived along the Nonni, Nomin and Gen rivers, after the Treaty of Nerchinsk they migrated to the Russian territory and probably became the ancestors of the Nercha Ewenkis. This identification is supported by the fact that the Nercha Ewenki and Khamnigan people were often treated as one in Russian official documents. The language of the Nercha Ewenkis was described by Castrén (1856) whose work was later translated into Russian by Titov (1926). During the initial years of Soviet rule (1918–1932) the Khamnigans followed the Buryats in their migration to Hulun Buir for a “better life” (Janhunen 1997: 130). It is also significant that the Nercha Ewenkis, just like other Ewenki people, were forbidden by customary laws to marry a person

⁷ For linguistic descriptions of Khamnigan Mongol and Khamnigan Ewenki see Janhunen’s works (1990, 1991). See also the paper of Gruntov and Mazo (2015) where the Russian loanwords in Khamnigan Mongol were investigated.

of the same tribe until the ninth generation, which may have led to their assimilation with Mongolic people⁸ (for details on Nercha Ewenkis' ethnography, tribal system and some linguistic features, see Khabtagaeva 2017: 34–35, 36, 37–45).

When interviewing Khamnigan speakers from 2010 onwards, we observed a slight shift in self-identification compared to Janhunén's description. Our Khamnigan informants mostly emphasized their Ewenki affiliation, stating that Ewenki is probably the original language of the community while Ewenkilig Mongol (the current emic term for Khamnigan Mongol) was adopted later "somewhere in Russia." At the same time, they supposed that the Boorji variety was earlier and was the original language of the Khamnigan community while Namiatii was a Mongolized form adopted by them in Manchuria. This slight change in "self-classification," which apparently took place in the past decade, may be connected to the recent promotion of endangered Ewenki culture in China by the government, which enables the Khamnigans to profit from their Ewenki identity. The idea of the unity of the three (or, sometimes, four, including the Orochens) Ewenki branches of China has been promoted in various spheres. Its more "expert" representations are the Ewenki Museum in Nantun, which is entirely organized along the model of three aspects of one Ewenki culture, or the lexicographic and other works by the Solon scholar Do Dorji.⁹ In popular culture, Khamnigan songs are often presented together with music of the Solons and the Yakut Ewenki.

All our informants, except for the native linguist Sendmaa (personal communication August 2010), prefer the term Tungus Ewenki above the ethnonym Khamnigan, and emphasize the fact that they belong to one group with the Solon and Yakut Ewenkis.

Sendmaa (personal communication 2010) estimates about 1,000 speakers of Khamnigan Ewenki and some 200 speakers of Khamnigan Mongol.

All but one of our informants had some knowledge of the Namiatii variety of Khamnigan Ewenki. Some of them, on the other hand, could not speak Khamnigan Mongol. It is worth noting that, according to the informants, the Boorji variety has become very rare, even though most of them claimed to have had a Boorji speaker in their family and could cite a few examples of Boorji peculiarities.

The situation of Khamnigan Mongol requires some attention, since this is probably the most important change in comparison with the situation described by Janhunén (1997). On page 133 Janhunén writes: "there is no imminent danger that the inherited bilingualism of the Khamnigan would be lost, for both the Tungusic and the Mongolic language are still being consistently transmitted to growing children." According to an elderly informant, in her childhood Khamnigan Mongol (Ewenkilig Mongol in her terminology) was one of the languages of instruction in the local school in Mergel. However, at present its scope of usage has shrunk to become a "kitchen language" in some Khamnigan families, being mainly used as a means of communication with children who study, or studied, in Mongol schools. Unlike the Ewenki varieties, Khamni-

⁸ In Tugolukov's opinion (1975: 109), before the 12th–13th centuries the Ewenki people were reindeer breeders and were later subjected to assimilation with Mongolic people. Besides marriages, another reason for assimilation was the change of lifestyle from reindeer breeding to horse breeding. The Ewenki legends tell us that when they came out with their reindeers to the steppe area, they were forced to change their lifestyle because of the absence of reindeer moss (Tugolukov 1975: 106).

⁹ Dorji has been the chief editor of an Ewenki-Chinese (1998) and Ewenki-Mongol (2013) dictionaries, where he treats the "Three Ewenki branches" together, taking Solon as a base.

gan Mongol has no governmental support, since it is not officially recognized in any way. For most of the members of the Khamnigan community under 30 years of age, Khamnigan Mongol was replaced by one of the Mongolian interdialects which serve as languages of instruction in the Mongol schools, and has ceased to be handed down. While remaining an important means of communication for speakers aged 60 years and older, it has become severely endangered since it is generally not used in public, and younger Khamnigans, while often having passive knowledge of Khamnigan Mongol, do not properly distinguish between it and other local Mongolian varieties. Our informants, when asked about Khamnigan Mongol, usually answered that it is “almost like Mongol.”

2.5. Solon

From historical sources, it is known that before the Manchu expansion the Solons, together with the Daur, formed a powerful confederation in the Middle Amur region, particularly in the Zeya basin, now on the Russian side of the border. Their growth in power was halted by the Qing expansion. In 1654, the Qing government moved them from their original homeland southwards, to the Qiqihar region. Since this period, the Solons have lived together with the Daur (Janhunen 1997: 130).

At present, the Solons, numbering about 10,000, are officially listed as Ewenki (Chin. Ewenke) together with the Khamnigans and the “Yakut Ewenki” (or the Manchurian Reindeer Tungus). Most of the Hulun Buir Solons live in several locations in the Ewenki autonomous banner, a large area south of Hailar. Janhunen (1997: 130) notes that the internal dialectology of Solon is an unexplored field and the relationship between Solon and other Ewenki dialects may prove to be more complicated than has been assumed.

The Solon Ewenkis, like the other Ewenki groups in China, do not have a literary language or script. During the first attempts at standardization in the 1980s, a script system was created on the basis of the Uighur-Mongolian script (for details, see Kara 2006). In recent decades, the native Solon researcher Do Dorji has created a writing system based on slightly adapted Latin (pinyin) script and used it in his Ewenki-Chinese (1998) and Ewenki-Mongol (2013) dictionaries. His Solon grammar and course book are in preparation (Do Dorji 2013: 5). Do Dorji has been one of the promoters of the unity of the three Ewenki groups (Solons, Khamnigans and the Yakut Ewenki or Reindeer Tungus), with the former being the leading group. This conception is reflected in his Ewenki dictionaries, where he treats all three Ewenki varieties together.

The Solon language, as well as their lifestyle, displays strong Mongol influence. Janhunen writes about the widespread bilingualism of the Solons in Daur, the language of their former confederates. However, neither during our fieldwork in 2017, nor in previous field trips did we witness any Solon speaker bilingual in Daur.¹⁰ Instead, in

¹⁰ Some phonetic criteria to differ the Daur elements in Solon were explored by Khabtagaeva (2012), e.g. the Daur “rhotacism” is a clear evidence of borrowing Daur loanwords in Solon Ewenki: Literary Mongolian *bosoy-a* ‘doorsill, threshold’, Daur *basarga* → Solon Ewenki *basarga* ~ *basagga*; Literary Mongolian *ulus* ‘people, nation, country’, Daur *olor* → Solon Ewenki *olor*; Literary Mongolian *čidkür* ‘devil, demon’, Daur *širkul* ~ *šurkul* → Solon Ewenki *širkul*; etc.

2017 all of our informants had an excellent knowledge of Standard Mongol. While Janhunen (1997: 131) assumes all Hulun Buir Solons preserve their language well, in 2017 the Solon competence of some of our informants was rather low. It seems that Standard Mongol has become the variety of prestige and knowledge of Solon has declined over the past twenty years.

2.6. *Daur*

The origins and history of the Daur before 1640 are debated (for a detailed overview of this discussion, see Cybenov 2012). Having lived on a large territory (in Shilka, Zeya and Bureya basins), the Daur and Ewenki formed a confederation known as Solon whose center was in the Shilka valley. The Daur, together with their Ewenki confederates, submitted to the Manchus in 1640 and were subsequently relocated to the Nonni valley. The Hailar Daur originate from the group of Daur who were sent to the area in 1932 in order to populate the borderlands. According to the accounts of local Daur, the group pleaded to return back to Manchuria soon after the relocation because the grasslands did not suit their lifestyle. The majority of the Daur returned, and only two families – Aula and Gowol – stayed in the area, to be later joined by members of the Merten clan. The first settlement of what later became the city of Hailar and the town of Nantun were built by these Daur (Atwood 2002: 117). Modern Hailar Daur view themselves as descendants of founders of Hailar and of all the local infrastructure (e.g. Damdinsurung, personal communication March 2014).

The Hailar area was dominated by speakers of Mongolian varieties, which has influenced the Hailar Daur language. While it is still fully mutually intelligible with all other Daur varieties, the features of Mongolian influence¹¹ make Hailar Daur easier to understand for local Mongols. The “story” of the Daur language as told by the Hailar Daur is a rather moving one. In the late 19th century, Daur intellectuals could use several languages and scripts: Mongolian, Manchu and Chinese. A slightly modified version of the Manchu script was used to note Daur.¹² To this notation of Daur, Cyrillic and Latin writing systems were added in the first decades of the 20th century, which are still in use by the older generation of the Daur. In the turbulent events of the first half of the 20th century members of Hailar Daur elite played important roles, mostly acting on behalf of the Mongols. In the 1970s, when most of the modern “ethnic minorities” were formally recognized in China, the main body of Daur in Morindawa and Butha strove to be listed as a separate ethnic group. The Hailar Daur, however felt closer to the Mongols in many respects. The government gave consent to the establishment of a separate Daur ethnic minority under the condition that Daur were listed in the category of a “minority without script,” which implied a denial of education in Daur and of government support for publishing books in Daur. Thus, even though Daur texts are occasionally published in the existing transcription systems, written Daur has completely ceased to be used as a means of communication amongst the younger Daur

¹¹ For example, in Hailar Daur the word-initial *h* which is often found in the other Daur varieties has generally disappeared.

¹² A frequently cited example is that of the Daur writer Aula Changxing, whose collected works written in a variety of languages and scripts have been published recently.

generations. The absence of Daur schools has, in the longer run, led to the complete replacement of Daur by Mandarin among the younger generations in the central Daur settlement in Morindawa. The situation, as mentioned by Janhunen (1997: 129), is slightly better in Butha, where middle-aged Daurs still have some competence in the Daur language.

As Janhunen notes, Hailar Daurs have best preserved their language because of the Mongolian speaking environment and the popularity of Mongol schools in the area. Most of the Daurs in the older generation studied in Mongolian schools and some of the middle-aged generation did too. Nevertheless, among the ethnic Daurs in western Hulun Buir met and interviewed by us between 2010 and 2017, those over 70 were all fluent in both Daur and (more or less “Dauricized”) Mongol, while most of the individuals between 30 and 60 had limited or passive knowledge of both Daur and Mongol. In western Hulun Buir we did not meet a single ethnic Daur under 30 years of age with active competence in Daur, even though reportedly some exist. Generally, it seems that while the prestige of Daur was high in western Hulun Buir until the 1990s, and continues to be high amongst the older generation of Daurs, it has rapidly declined over the past two decades, leading to complete replacement by Mandarin among the youngest generation.

2.7. Russian

In his paper from 1997 (p. 126), Janhunen mentions the small community of Sino-Russians in the Ergune region, who are officially classified as Russians (Eluosi). In the past two decades, after the fear of persecution due to the Cultural Revolution finally faded away, the Ergune Russians started to profit from their exoticism. Some now living in Hailar often engage in baking and selling “Russian” bread and pastry and advertise the “Russian” village in the Three Rivers region – or Ergune – as a tourist attraction. This development has been accompanied with acquisition of Russian language skills by some younger ethnic “Russians.” This trend is also supported by the newly opened local border crossing point in Ergune, through which more speakers of Russian have come to the region. Some of these Sino-Russians also have substantial skills in spoken and written Mongolian. A Russian woman in her 70s, who settled in Nantun in her childhood and married a Daur, speaks all the varieties of Nantun languages (see part 3.3) in addition to Russian.

2.8. Khorchin

Khorchin is the largest non-indigenous Mongolic language in the area. Khorchin speakers from the Khingan League and from the titular Khorchin township of Tongliao (formerly the Jerim league), live both in towns and in the countryside. The principal lifestyle of modern Khorchins is agriculture and small-scale sedentary animal husbandry. In Hulun Buir, the greater part of Khorchins engage in activities similar to those of the Chinese: besides running small businesses such as shops and restaurants, there are Khorchin artisans of all types, taxi drivers, etc. As well as these typical activi-

ties, many Khorchin settlers live in the countryside and are engaged in herding similar to the modern Old Bargu, Öölöd and Solon style (i.e. sedentary herding of relatively large herds of predominantly sheep and horses). In addition, Khorchins occupy important positions in local governmental and educational institutions of all types. Thus, the Khorchin Mongols not only mingle with the indigenous population on all levels, but, as school and university teachers, have significant influence on the younger generations. This said, it is not the Khorchin proper which exercises the greatest influence in Hulun Buir. Khorchin, the Tongliao variety in particular, besides being of the extreme Eastern Mongolian type, contains 40–60 percent Chinese vocabulary in addition to Manchu loanwords and independent developments. Thus, Khorchin proper is scarcely intelligible to most other Mongol and Mongolic speakers and in Hulun Buir is mainly used as a means of communication inside the Khorchin community, while in public a type of Mongol interdialect is used by the Khorchins.

2.9. *Interdialects and varieties of Inner Mongolian Standard Mongol*

In Hulun Buir, Mongolic varieties have long been the main means of interethnic communication, even for Tungusic people. Approximately until the Cultural Revolution, **New Bargu** was considered the most prestigious variety, followed by Daur. One of the reasons for the prestige of New Bargu was its closeness to Khalkha.¹³

At present, the situation is rather complicated, varying often from speaker to speaker. Chakhar, on which the Inner Mongolian standard variety is based, is only spoken by native speakers living in Hulun Buir. Janhunen (1996: 833) writes: “Some Buryats and Khamnigans,” rather than learning Chakhar, “approximate the official language by modifying their native speech in the direction of Mongolian proper.” In our recent observations, several such “approximated” forms serve as the means of interethnic communication in Hulun Buir instead of standard Inner Mongolian.

With the massive in-migration of the Khorchins from the Khingan league after the Cultural Revolution, followed by the Tongliao Khorchins, another variety started taking over that can be described as an interdialect varying between a heavily “Khorchinized” standard Inner Mongolian, and Khorchin with its most peculiar lexical and grammatical features replaced by the Inner Mongolian standard equivalents. This interdialect will be referred to as the “**Khorchin-type Standard Mongol.**” At present this variety is used by a sizable majority of the younger generation in Hulun Buir. For some of the speakers, this is a medium of interethnic communication besides their own native language, while for others this variety is the only non-Chinese language they use actively.

While this Khorchin-type interdialect has become the principal Mongol variety for the younger generation, amongst older generations the use of more ethno-specific varieties of both New Bargu and the Khorchin interdialect is observed.

¹³ Khalkha enjoyed high prestige as early as in the 20th century as a variety spoken in the cultural and political center of the Northern Mongolia and by its elite (Vladimirtsov 1929: 49 [2005: 459], Kapišovská 2005: 56). Later on, as a language of an independent Mongolian state it was regarded as highly prestigious in Hulun Buir throughout the 20th century. In 1999, the Hulun Buir Mongols still proudly emphasized that their “official” Mongol variety is closer to Khalkha than Chakhar, the Inner Mongolian standard variety.

As well as the New Bargu speakers themselves, it is mainly the Old Bargu and Buryats who use New Bargu proper as a means of interethnic communication. The Daur use a **Daur-type Standard Mongol**, whose general phonetic shape is closer to Khorchin than to Bargu, with certain Daur features such as the comitative suffix pronounced as [ti:] instead of the Standard Mongol [tä:], or the use of some frequent Daur lexical items such as *aituu*: ‘much’. The Khamnigans use the **Khamnigan-type Standard Mongol**, a dialect close to the New Bargu variety with strong Khamnigan influence, particularly on its phonetic shape.

The Solons have been bilingual in Daur for centuries. The Solons and Daur already had close political and economic interactions, and mixed marriages before the migration across the Amur basin. In Manchu sources the term Solons encompassed the Daur too (for details, see Kõhalmi 1982: 294–296). As Janhunen (1997: 130) notes: “wherever we have Daur people we also find a corresponding smaller group of Solon.” Due to the fact that the Solon Ewenkis usually study in Mongolian schools, all Solon Ewenkis are fluent in the Bargu or Khorchin type of Standard Mongol too.

3. Ethnic and linguistic distinctions in western Hulun Buir

Hulun Buir has a peculiar “ethnic” setting, connected to the fact that all pre-20th century immigrants derive their origins from units of the Manchu military system. Atwood’s analysis (2005) of the works of Guberi, a Bargu man of letters, shows that their primary identity was that of Manchu bannermen, but at the same time distinctions close to what we now call “ethnic” were kept. Inter marriages within the banners were common but separate identities of the Old and New Bargu, Solon, Daur and Öölöd were transmitted by patrilineal descent, mostly associated with a particular language. When the Buryats and Khamnigans arrived in the early 20th century, they were – in a very “orderly” fashion and without creating major tensions – accepted by the local authorities. Soon they were involved in participating in this system, which seems to have worked with few changes until the present day, now also including the Khorchin Mongols and, occasionally, Russians.¹⁴ The described processes gave rise to the stable inventory of the traditional ethnic distinctions of western Hulun Buir (notably the Old Bargu, New Bargu, Solon, Daur, Öölöd, Buryat and Khamnigan), that are generally more important than the official classification into Mongolian, Daur and Ewenki.

At present, although the notion of patrilineage is important, other factors – pertaining to both individuals and groups – play a role in the self-identification of Hulun Buir natives. The importance assigned to the notion of ethnic identity and preservation of language seems to vary among particular groups. Buryats and Öölöds maintain their identities more vigorously than, for example, the Daur or Solons. At the same time, however, self-identification in terms of the traditional ethnic divisions is rather flexible and whether an individual emphasizes their father’s or mother’s side often depends on the situation.

¹⁴ Inter marriages with Chinese people are a rather recent phenomenon, whose impact it is still too early to evaluate.

Linguistically, as a consequence of frequent intermarriages, in many families two indigenous languages are spoken in addition to a language of interethnic communication – at present usually one of the forms of Standard Inner Mongolian. In addition, in certain areas where more ethnic groups live intermixed, simultaneous knowledge of several languages is common.

Below we try, in a preliminary way, to give some details which illustrate the above-mentioned features of the specific ethnic and linguistic milieu of Hulun Buir.

3.1. Intermarriages

There seem to be no major cultural constraints concerning intermarriages between members of the various ethnic groups and language communities of western Hulun Buir. The available information suggests that the same was valid for previous generations. Among our informants of different age groups, couples composed of members of two distinct language communities are observed to be more frequent than monolingual couples. This situation seems to be typical for cities and towns such as Hailar, Nantun (the center of the Old Bargu Banner) and others, whereas in the countryside, especially in the two banners of New Bargu, monolingual families seem to prevail. The self-identification of individuals from mixed couples largely depends of their own choice and often varies according to the context and audience.

The following are examples of (linguistically) mixed couples observed among our informants and their parents (noted in the sequence wife-husband and listed by the age category).

- Age 80–90 New Bargu – Khorchin,
Khamnigan (Namiatii) – Khamnigan (Boorji),
- Age 70–80 Daur – Old Bargu,
Old Bargu – Daur,
Buryat – New Bargu,
Khamnigan (Namiatii) – Khamnigan (Boorji),
Russian – Daur,
- Age 60–70 Khamnigan – Buryat,
Khamnigan (Mongol) – Old Bargu,
Solon – Old Bargu,
- Age 50–60 Buryat – Öölöd,
Öölöd – Khorchin,
Solon – Öölöd,
- Age 40–50 Khorchin – Öölöd,
Old Bargu – Solon,
Khorchin – Solon,
- Age 30–40 Khamnigan – Old Bargu,
Buryat – Öölöd.

Certain tendencies are found in the overall picture but these require further field-work and verification. Nevertheless, the informants often mention the growing number of intermarriages of local ethnic groups with the Khorchin immigrants, which is closely related to the latest developments in the sphere of language.

3.2. Multilingualism

In western Hulun Buir, most of the non-Han population is at least bilingual, with some regions being especially known for the multilingual skills of their inhabitants. In these regions the speakers are (or used to be) competent in several different languages and varieties besides their native language(s) and switched between them for different purposes and under different circumstances (e.g. main language of instruction at school, language of communication with neighbors, literary language learned as a medium of higher education and considered to be prestigious as such, etc.). The particular language proficiency level varies from individual to individual. Based on several years of observation of the language situation in Hulun Buir, we try to stratify language proficiency into several typical modes (described below), as well as to describe the overall situation in selected multilingual environments (3.2.1) and show the hierarchy of the languages spoken in the areas under research (3.3.2).

Mode 1a. This refers to an excellent-to-good command of both spoken and written language. It is observed in individuals who received education in a given language and (it) was attested for the Mongolian superdialects, Chinese and Japanese. Somewhat different is the situation with Russian, Buryat and Daur, since the written forms and literary languages are not taught in schools; nevertheless we encountered individuals with good competence in these, too. Daur writing systems are, furthermore, peculiar in that they are mainly used for noting folklore texts and therefore suffer from a lack of modern vocabulary.

Mode 1b. This refers to the excellent command of a spoken variety. It is typically found in native speakers or in fluent (first language) speakers of the particular languages.

Mode 1c. This refers to the excellent command of a written language. It is generally reserved for Manchu that has functioned only as a written language in western Hulun Buir for a long time.

Mode 2. This refers to a rather good command of spoken and sometimes of written language. It implies better competence in a language than the one defined by the term “semi-speaker” (Winford 2003: 261). This mode is observed typically in younger generations in non-Chinese families. The competency of the speakers covers all life situations, but their vocabulary is limited in comparison to mode 1b speakers, and contains more Chinese loanwords and loan translations. These speakers are often criticized by the older generation for their shallow knowledge of their native tongue. However, the knowledge of Chinese amongst the older generation also often fits into this description.

Mode 3. This refers to basic oral skills. This type of competency is common in the multi-ethnic areas of Hulun Buir and involves everyday communication phrases, basic vocabulary and grammar. Mode 3 speakers typically recall that they learned the language in childhood through communication with friends who belonged to another language community, and as adults they often use their skills just to express politeness or openness towards the native speakers of the particular language.

Mode 4. This refers to passive speakers. This mode in the Hulun Buir context involves usually partial understanding of the given language and active knowledge of certain phrases. Typically, the children in non-Chinese families with Mandarin as a first language know their ethnic language to this extent.

These language proficiency modes can be best demonstrated on case study of three families in western Hulun Buir. It is also worth noting that the ethnic identification of informants does not necessarily correspond precisely to the language they claim to be fluent speakers of, as sometimes they in fact speak a kind of intermediate variety, as mentioned by a member of Family 2.

Case study 1

This first family described, that of our main informants, generally identify themselves as Mongol, more specifically as Öölöd, Bargu or Bargu-Buryat.

Generation 1. For the first generation described, that of the great-parents of our main informant, the information is incomplete. In the maternal lineage the great-parents were refugees from Soviet Russia while in the paternal lineage the grandfather was a wealthy Bargu merchant.

Generation 2. The second generation is that of the parents of our main informant and her husband. In the female lineage the mother was a Shinekhen Buryat and the father was a Buryat raised in a Bargu family who identified himself as a Bargu. In the male lineage, the mother was a Shinekhen Buryat and the father was of a Daur-Öölöd descent and identified himself as an Öölöd.

Generation 3. In the third generation described our main informant identifies herself as Buryat, Bargu-Buryat or Bargu depending on the context, mainly on the ethnic composition of the audience. Her husband on most occasions claims to be Öölöd but sometimes also Bargu or Buryat. Both of them studied in Mongol schools and at the Inner Mongolian University in Hohhot (M.A. degree). Our main informant gained her Ph.D. degree at the Minzu University in Beijing.

Generation 4. The children (25–30-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter) of our main informant most often identify themselves as Mongol or Öölöd, and the daughter-in-law (20–30) as a Buryat. The son attended Chinese school while the daughter and daughter-in-law studied at Mongol schools. All three members of this generation, after growing up in Hailar, decided to move to Ulan Bator (Mongolia) five years ago and still live there.

Generation 1		Generation 2		Generation 3		Generation 4	
1		2		3		4	
Maternal great-grandfather 1		Maternal grandmother		Mother		Son	
Buryat	1b	Mongol (Bargu type)	1a	Mongol (Bargu type)	1a	Mandarin	1a
Japanese	1a	Buryat	1b	Chinese	1a	Mongol (Khorchin type)	2
		Mandarin	2	Buryat	1b		
Maternal great-grandfather 2		Maternal grandfather		Father		Daughter	
Mongol (Bargu type)	1a	Mongol (Bargu type)	1a	Mongol (Bargu type)	1a	Mandarin	1a
Chinese	?	Russian		Mandarin	1a	Mongol (Khorchin type)	2
Russian	?	Chinese	1a	Mongol (Öölöd type)	1b		
				Daur	1b	Khalkha	2

1	2	3	4
Maternal great-great-uncle	Paternal grandmother		Daughter-in-law
Buryat 1b	Buryat 1b		
	Mongol (Öölöd type) 1a		
Russian 1a	Mandarin 2		
	Solon 4		
	Paternal grandfather		Mongol (Khorchin type) 1a
	Mongol (Öölöd type) 1a		Mandarin 1a
	Daur 1b		Buryat 1b
	Solon 1b		
	Mandarin 4		

Family 2

This family identify themselves as “Tungus Ewenki,” a name they prefer to the designation “Khamnigan.”

Generation 1. applies to maternal grandparents, since we only have very general information on the paternal grandparents. The grandparents from both sides came from Russia and were allegedly fluent in Russian. The maternal grandfather was a Boorji speaker while the maternal grandmother spoke Namiatii.

Generation 2. The father, a teacher at the local school known as a learned person among the Khamnigans, died young and the mother, herself a retired primary school teacher, brought up her two daughters alone.

Generation 3. One daughter studied at the Inner Mongolian University in Hohhot and works at the Department of Mongolian Studies at the Hulun Buir University. The other daughter is a housewife. Both daughters married Bargu Mongol men. When speaking about their languages they refer to the two Ewenki dialects as the “Boorji” and “Namiatii,” and to the Mongolic dialect as “Ewenkilig Mongol” (i.e. Ewenkized Mongol).

Generation 1		Generation 2		Generation 3	
Maternal grandmother		Mother		Older daughter	
Namiatii	1b	Mongol (Khamnigan type)	1a	Mongol (Khorchin type)	1a
Russian	1a				
Ewenkilig Mongol	1b	Namiatii	1b	Mandarin	1a
		Ewenkilig Mongol	1b	Namiatii	2
				Khamnigan Mongol	2
				Buryat	3
		Mandarin	2		
Maternal grandfather		Father		Younger daughter	
Boorji	1b	Boorji	1b	Mongol (Khorchin type)	1a
		Russian	1a	Mandarin	1a
Russian	1a	Khamnigan Mongol	1b	Namiatii	4
Ewenkilig Mongol	1b	Mandarin	1a	Khamnigan Mongol	4

Family 3

This family generally identify themselves as Öölöd.

Generation 1. In the first generation the maternal grandfather died young and we only have information about the maternal grandmother. We also have no information about paternal grandparents.

Generation 2. Although the father is of Khorchin (peasant) descent, the whole family live as herders in the countryside in the Imin Öölöd territory.

Generation 3. The daughter-in-law comes from a Chinese settlement and therefore has only passive knowledge of Mongol.

Maternal grandmother		Mother		Older son	
Mongol (Öölöd type)	1b	Mongol (Öölöd type)	1a	Mandarin	1a
Solon	3	Mandarin	2	Mongol (Öölöd type)	1a
Mandarin	4				
Russian	4				
		Father		Younger son	
		Mongol (Khorchin type)	1a	Mandarin	1a
		Mandarin	1a	Mongol (Öölöd type)	2
				Daughter-in-law	
				Mandarin	1a

While these examples require further analysis, at first glance it is clear that simultaneous knowledge of several indigenous languages is typical for the older generations while younger generations in Mongol families tend to have a higher proficiency level in Mandarin. In the Khamnigan family the language with highest prestige is still considered to be Standard Mongol.

3.2.1. An example of a multilingual area in western Hulun Buir: Nantun (Bayantoqai)¹⁵

The following is a brief description of a linguistic situation observed in a traditionally multilingual locality. Nantun was originally a small (now rapidly growing) settlement, located immediately south of Hailar. Nantun has the status of the Ewenki autonomous banner seat. Until the 1990s, the majority of Nantun’s population was non-Chinese, consisting mainly of the ethnic groups whose “titular” settlements are located close to this town: the Daur, Solon, Buryat and Khamnigan. In addition, Chinese and Khorchin immigrants have long been present in Nantun. Probably owing to its small size as well as other specific conditions,¹⁶ the Nantun milieu seems to have been fa-

¹⁵ Nantun was established in the 18th century as the main settlement of the Daur Aul clan (Atwood 2002: 117).

¹⁶ In the 1990s, traditional dwellings consisting of earthen houses with yards still prevailed in Nantun, with modern houses only starting to be built. In the traditional parts of Nantun, all ethnic

avorable for the development of multilingual skills. Most of the ethnic minority population in Nantun over 30 years of age are fluent in some of the Mongol superdialects in addition to Mandarin and their own native language. Daur and Buryat are also widely spoken by members of other ethnic groups.

In 2011, one of the authors was allowed to be present at the regular daily consultation time of the Nantun Daur shamaness Sechingoa (ca. 60 years old). During this half-day session, clients from the Daur, Buryat, Chinese, Solon, New Bargu and Khorchin groups came to consult her regarding their problems. Sechingoa communicated with the Daur, Buryat, Solon and Mandarin speakers in their respective languages while she used the Daur-type Mongol superdialect for communication with the Khorchin and Bargu speakers. Her performance in all these languages and dialect was fluent and the communication with the native speakers was smooth, with the exception of the Mandarin speaker who repeatedly asked questions to clarify Sechingoa's advice. On other occasions (2015) we observed a Nantun Khorchin native speaker in his 40s switching among Khorchin, Buryat and Daur. On the one hand, the performance of Sechingoa, a famous shamaness and a former school teacher, can be considered extreme even in the Nantun environment; on the other, most of our informants, when asked, confirmed that in Nantun knowledge of spoken Daur and Buryat in addition to languages of general communication – Mongol and Mandarin – is still widespread in the middle-aged and older generations. Many Nantun inhabitants also claim passive knowledge of Solon, while active competence of Solon among the Mongolic (Daur, Buryat, Khorchin and Bargu) speakers occurs less frequently.

Following our observations and interviews taken between 2010 and 2017, amongst younger generations active knowledge of more than one indigenous language is becoming a rarity. Skills in several languages are more common among young Buryats, Solons and Khamnigans than among other groups.

4. Hierarchy of languages in western Hulun Buir

From our observations, it follows that the hierarchy of prestige of languages in western Hulun Buir differs between localities and varies not only among generations but also changes with time within a single generation. The latter may be illustrated by a statement of a Daur informant in her 60s: “For the most of our lives we were struggling to speak, write and teach our children the Mongol language. Now, we feel that it is better for everyone to go over to Chinese. I encourage everyone to use Chinese.”

Below we try to establish a generalized hierarchy of the Hulun Buir languages and to group them according to their function as a means of communication within the ethnic network.

1. Languages limited to one ethnic group. *Khamnigan Mongol* is mainly used within Khamnigan families, in particular among the older generations and as a means of communication between parents and their Mongol-speaking children. We have not encountered any non-Khamnigan with any command of Khamnigan Mongol.

groups had long lived alongside each other and were in constant contact. Friendly and close neighborly relations have been maintained, even after people started moving into modern houses.

Khamnigan Ewenki. The Boorji variety of Khamnigan Ewenki has reportedly become rare and we have not met any active speakers among our informants. The Namiatii variety is still widely used in Khamnigan families but it has been observed in use only by speakers with one or both Khamnigan parents.

Öölöd Mongol. Though the Imin Öölöds use either the Bargu or the Khorchin types of the Mongol interdialect, the usage of several Oirat words and suffixes as a sign of identity can still be observed in certain Öölöd families. However, this feature is never used by a person who does not identify oneself as an Öölöd.

Khorchin. The genuine Tongliao Khorchin, the native tongue of the recent Khorchin immigrants, is only spoken inside Khorchin families. In communication outside strictly Khorchin milieu the Khorchins use the Khorchin-type Mongol interdialect.

Old Bargu. Knowledge of Old Bargu in the middle and younger generations has become rather obscure in recent decades. We have not encountered any information about the use of Old Bargu by someone from outside the community.

2. Languages spoken to a limited degree by members of other ethnic groups in a certain area. *Solon.* We have observed a limited use of Solon by members of other language communities (Daur, Öölöd, Khorchin) in Nantun and a Solon-dominated area in the countryside.

3. Languages widely spoken by members of other groups in a certain area. *Buryat.* The Buryat language is widely used by non-Buryats (mainly Daur, Solons and Khorchins) in Nantun. Further, in Shinekhen, non-Buryat speakers, including ethnic Chinese, frequently use Buryat as a means of communication with the Buryats. The degree of proficiency varies from basic phrases to good competence.

Daur. Active Daur skills are widespread among non-Daurs in Nantun and in the Daur ethnic settlements in the vicinity of Nantun and Hailar. Janhunen describes the historical bilingualism of the Solons in Daur and the persistent knowledge of Daur by the Solons. In 2017, our Solon informants used Mongol (mostly the Khorchin type standard) instead of Daur as their second language. Reportedly, Daur language is still spoken by some elderly Solons. The prestige of Daur probably has two main sources – the historical bilingualism of the Solons and the important position of the Daurs in local government.

4. Languages used as a general means of inter-ethnic communication in western Hulun Buir. *Standard Mongol (Bargu, Khorchin, Daur, Khamnigan and Öölöd types).* The varieties of Standard Mongol as described above function as a means of communication among speakers of all the languages in western Hulun Buir except for those whose first language is Mandarin. With the exception of the Ergune region, Hailar, and the Chinese settlements which accompany mines, power plants and other enterprises set up by the Chinese, Standard Mongol varieties are used in the public sphere (shops, restaurants, local governments) as an alternative to Mandarin. The above-mentioned varieties are fully mutually intelligible. Some speakers use one of the varieties, while others switch between two or three depending on their skills and the expectations of their collocutors.

Mandarin or the standard Chinese language (*putonghua*), together with the simplified Chinese script, is the most general means of interethnic communication in Hulun Buir. Among the population of western Hulun Buir there is probably no one with complete ignorance of Mandarin, although amongst the oldest generations there are

individuals with passive knowledge only. For example, in 2016, an 80-year-old Öölöd informant stated that she never went alone to the closest town – a Chinese settlement around a coal mine – because she was not able to speak in Mandarin, even though she understood it. In rural areas, in every generation there are non-Chinese individuals with Mandarin skills limited to basic conversation. In towns and cities, the Mandarin skills of non-Chinese speakers are usually very good for all generations, and for many of them Mandarin is their first language.

5. Foreign languages. Russian. Knowledge of Russian as a “foreign language,, i.e. with the purpose of communication with foreigners, is still encountered in the oldest generation, even though it was mostly the generation of their parents in which there were many fluent Russian speakers. During the Cultural Revolution, Russian speakers were often labelled “Soviet spies” and persecuted, and fear of persecution prevented young people from learning Russian until the 1990s. Since then, quite similarly to Xinjiang, Russian has become popular in Hulun Buir, with most of the young speakers with good competence being Buryat. In addition, a variety of Russian pidgin emerged in Manzhouli (cf. Namsaraeva 2014).

Japanese. Japanese was one of the languages of administration during the Manchukuo period. Japanese schools existed in Hulun Buir and the prestige of Japanese among educated people was high. Similarly to the situation with Russian, knowledge of Japanese was severely persecuted in Cultural Revolution but has largely re-gained its prestige since 1990. Large numbers of current octogenarians received higher education in Japan, and their Japanese skills are close to native speaker level. Among younger generations, many local intellectuals spent some time studying in Japan and speak Japanese.

6. Written Manchu. The situation with literary Manchu in Hulun Buir is unique within the former Manchu empire. As a community of Manchu bannermen, the first settlers of Hulun Buir in the 18th century extensively used Manchu in addition to Mongol. At the beginning of the 20th century Manchu was still the main language of administration (Atwood 2005: 23). During the Manchukuo period, Manchu was rarely used in central areas, but in Hulun Buir Manchu quite naturally continued to serve as the language of administration. While the use of oral Manchu was limited mainly to songs,¹⁷ knowledge of written Manchu was common among the educated Daur, Bargu and Solons and at present some octogenarians with knowledge of literary Manchu still live in Hulun Buir.

Conclusions

Western Hulun Buir is an area where the co-existence of multiple ethnic groups and languages has been documented since the 18th century. Migrations and developments in administration, education and the overall political climate led to a distinct picture of a network of language communities, most of which use two and more languages. During the past half-century, however, many of the languages have become endangered. As a whole, the linguistic situation in Hulun Buir has so far only been described in Janhunen’s article of 1997. Twenty years later, during our fieldwork in September 2017,

¹⁷ Sharibu, personal communication, August 1992.

we observed the following changes and tendencies in the situation of the indigenous languages of western Hulun Buir:

- a) a tendency towards Sinicization in younger generations of all language groups, especially in cities and primarily Chinese settlements. The number of Mandarin speakers is increasing in non-Chinese communities, while Mandarin is used as the main language in education and media and its prestige is growing. This can be witnessed in the case of Hailar Daur which has very few, if any, speakers under 30.
- b) a tendency towards abandoning officially unrecognized varieties in favor of recognized dialects, namely Inner Mongolian Standard Mongol (in several modifications) and, to a much lesser extent, Ewenki. This attitude is supported by the language policy carried out in Inner Mongolia with the aim of enforcing the implementation of the standard variety (IMSM) over the whole region.

The dialects which suffer most due to this tendency are Khamnigan Mongol, which has not been officially recognized in any way, and Daur, which has the official status of an unwritten language.

- c) a tendency towards the conscious keeping of language skills conditioned by the speakers' attitude. The best example is Shinekhen Buryat, whose vernacular and written forms are not recognized in China but the speakers of which retain a strongly positive attitude to their mother tongue. In Shinekhen, Buryat is used in public spaces as well as at home and is transmitted to children. In certain communities (Old Bargu, Öölöd) we witnessed the intentional keeping of specific dialectal features as signs of identity.

In sum, despite the ongoing process of language unification which affects all language communities in Hulun Buir, the speed of the changes varies greatly between individual communities, mostly depending on the attitude of speakers. Comparing the present situation with the description and prospects formulated by Janhunen, in some cases the outcome, such as that of Khamnigan Mongol, took a different turn than the author supposed in 1997.

Multilingualism. Most of the non-Chinese population of western Hulun Buir is fluent in two or more languages. Monolingualism only occurs in non-Chinese native speakers of Mandarin. However, there are several localities where knowledge of three or more languages is common. Such multilingualism is closely related to intermarriages – the multilingual individuals often come from families of mixed descent. Additional skills in minority languages in the multilingual areas are commonly acquired in childhood as a result of communication with children of speakers of the languages concerned. In the latter case, the level of knowledge is usually lower than with languages learned at home or at school.

We have described in more detail the situation in Nantun where some speakers have active command of up to five languages. Some aspects of the situation in Nantun resemble what Lüpke (2016) calls “small-scale multilingualism.” On the one hand, some languages enjoy higher prestige than others. On the other, knowledge of more than one language is generally highly appreciated and speakers often switch codes only in order to show their abilities. Switching into the collocutor's language can often be interpreted as a demonstration of one's politeness towards the collocutor. The multilingual setting of Nantun, however, is changing with the growth of the youngest generation and with the influx of Mandarin speakers into the town.

In terms of **hierarchy and prestige**, two languages far exceed others: Mandarin and Inner Mongolian Standard Mongol. While in the Chinese-dominated area Mandarin has become the means of interethnic communication, Standard Mongol still serves as an alternative for speakers with low proficiency in Mandarin. In many areas Standard Mongol is the first choice in interethnic communication. Several other languages (Buryat, Daur, Bargu) are used in interethnic communication to a limited extent. Some languages (Khamnigan Mongol and Ewenki, Öölöd and Khorchin) are used only in communities between speakers of these languages.

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